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ABSTRACT

The perceptions of Laotian refugee parents about what constitutes a "best teacher" were studied. The study focused on the Lao Loum ethnic group, and did not include members of Hmong or other ethnic minority groups. Twenty-eight Likert-based interviews were conducted with Laotian refugee parents residing in 5 states in the United States. Parent responses indicated that the "best teacher" would be Asian, teach at the high school level, and be male. They thought that the best teacher would be able to manage disruptive behavior and enforce fair discipline while demonstrating punctuality and good attendance. The best teacher would accept constructive criticism in a positive manner, be fair with regard to issues of race and ethnicity, and fair to both genders. Parents were not interested in having the teacher reward positive behavior rather than punishing negative behavior, nor did they value high expectations for all students, demanding grading, and effective communication with students at their levels of learning. The perceptions about a best teacher may reflect prior experiences of these parents in Laos, and may not concur with characteristics identified in the United States for superior teachers. (Contains 28 figures and 75 references.) (SLD)

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LAOTIAN REFUGEE PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF A "BEST TEACHER"

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ABSTRACT

This project was designed to study Laotian refugee parents' perceptions of a "best teacher" and is restricted to the Lao Loum ethnolinguistic group. Representing the largest population of Laos (68%), the Lao Loum community has been has been privy to few educational research and/or inquiry projects. Hmong refugees or other ethnic minorities from Laos were not included in the interviews. Reported in the study is a review of the Laotian refugee experience in the United States, a literature review of research conducted on South East Asians, a discussion of the methodology used in gaining the interview data, and the findings of the data analysis. Discussion is offered to improve the success of this population in educating its children in the schools.

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CHAPTER ONE: PROBLEM AND PURPOSE

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Laos is officially known as the Lao People's Democratic Republic and in short, Laos. Laos is a communist state with the capital in Vientiane. It is located in South East Asia between Vietnam and Thailand. Independence was gained on July 19, 1949 from France. One of the world's poorest nations, Laos has had a Communist centrally planned economy since 1975. Systematic immigration to the USA of many Laotians from refugee camps in Thailand occurred during the period of 1975 –to- 1978.

The lowland Laotian immigrant population (Lao Loum) represents a distinctly different ethnolinguistic population than the Hmong or Ming Mountain peoples of Laos. They may be described as representatives of the lowland population of Laos and makeup nearly 68% of the Laotian national population. Other ethnic groups are listed by their rank order of population within Laos: Lao Theung (upland) 22%, Lao Soung (highland) including the Hmong ("Meo") 9%, and ethnic Vietnamese/Chinese 1%. The predominant religion is Buddhist (85%) (Laos Information, 1999).

According to the Dr. Vang Pobzeb of the Lao Human Rights Council (1999), there are about 200,000 Hmong and 100,000 Laotian-American people in the United States. Within the USA, the Laotian ethnic minority Hmong have become the majority of the individuals arriving as immigrants. Many of these individuals first settled in the United States in 1975 after spending time in the refugee camps in Thailand.

This study is focused on Laotian (Lao Loum) refugee parents' perceptions of a "best teacher" and is not inclusive of the Hmong population or other ethnic minorities from Laos. It represents a survey project of an ethnolinguistic population that has been privy to few educational research and/or inquiry projects. .

The purpose of this investigation is to survey Laotian refugee parents regarding their perceptions of the characteristics of a "best teacher." The study is designed to

contribute to the professional literature, abundant in its collection of material on university and teachers' discernment of the "best teacher," but deficient in data reporting the perceptions of parents. It is a based on a model of inquiry that was designed by Mack and Jackson (1993).

RATIONALE

As noted earlier, minimal educational research has been conducted on the Laotian (Lao Loum) refugee population that was resettled in the United States. This segment of the Laotian population represents a growing portion of the school enrollment with little research attributed to their involvement with schools and schooling. Confounding the possibility of conducting research on this population are the limitations of English proficiency and the wariness of "outsiders". A scan of ERIC documents presented nearly 95% of the research conducted on the Hmong population.

Laotians have many values that are similar to mainstream American values such as: respect for hard work, a concern about personal honor, and honesty. Some values, however, are in conflict with dominant American values such as:

- a strong family-orientated society,
- a tradition of arranged marriages,
- a belief in an education for some but not all males in a family,
- a need to display material possessions of extreme value and prestige,
- non-assertiveness
- ancestor worship
- social structure designed to avoid "loss of face,"
- strong group identity,
- embarrassment in receiving praise,
- a belief in extremely limited education for females in favor of marriage,
- and a resolute Buddhist religious tradition.

With regard to educational issues, the first challenge for educators is that of language. While Laotian parents value education, they do not want their children to lose either their language or Buddhist traditions or their culture, which are viewed as interconnected. Often their perception of a "best teacher" is based on an educational experience in a refugee camp or rural village in Laos.

For the Lao population in the United States, perceived characteristics of a "best teacher" might vary greatly from the qualities deemed important in the teacher training efforts of institutions of higher education or those rewarded in school districts. Mack (1992) suggested that the perceived characteristics of a ""best teacher" are highly associated with the characteristics of a well-liked teacher. Although this stereotype is value laden, he suggested that it serve as a model for the desirable attributes of a successful teacher. If a teacher is perceived to complement the parents' characteristics of a "best teacher" that teacher will receive better support from the home and be more likely to excite student motivation and success.

BACKGROUD OF THE STUDY

The Laotian population of nearly 100,000 individuals has been identified as representing the "invisible poor" of the Asian-American population. A sizable segment of the South East Asian refugees live in dire poverty. Most of the Laotian population lives in California, Michigan, Ohio, Texas, Iowa, and Florida. In California, about one in three South East Asians receives public aid, more than two-thirds of the Laotians are on the welfare rolls (LCW News Reports, 1999). No population within the Asian racial group offers such a stark contrast to the stereotype of the successful Asian American than the Laotian community. They have been described as shattering the "model minority" label so often attached to Asian Americans. This poverty has an affect on parents' perception concerning "best teacher" and could be one of the reasons for the differences in perception between teachers and parents.

Enaj (1994) discovered that the characteristics of "best teacher" often differed when expressed by parents and teachers. These differences in opinion can result in strained relationships between the home and school, and make fulfilling the basic educational needs of the child more difficult.

Schools anticipate a strong alliance with the home and interaction with the parents. Among the many factors that influence the level and quality of South East Asian parents' involvement with the schools are parents' literacy level, prearrival education, and strong cultural beliefs (Morrow, 1991).

Hughes (1990) discovered that Laotian parent values varied by education level, fluency in English, and age, with the oldest parents the most traditional, and the youngest parents the most acculturated. Limited financial resources appeared to be the overriding problem for Laotians, complicated by cultural changes brought on by immigration. The expectations of these parents differed from those of Anglo-American parents, particularly in the areas of sex role and children's respect toward parents and adults.

Very seldom have surveys been undertaken to obtain information on parents' perceptions of their "best teacher." Contributing to the difficulties of this type of study are two requirements which must be established in the evaluation of a stereotype: (a) the characteristics of the stereotype must be accepted by a significant number of the population, and (b) there has to be some kind of logical association among the characteristics (Mack and Jackson, 1993; McLuahn, 1970). As with any stereotype, this pattern would have to be logical in association, but not necessarily representative of everyone in the group (Wright, 1984).

STATEMENT OF THE PURPOSE

The purpose of this investigation is to improve the conditions of Laotian students in the schools by interviewing Laotian refugee parents regarding their perceptions of the characteristics of a "best teacher."

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The goals of this project include:

- Review of the literature associated with the topic.
- Design of a survey instrument based on the Mack and Jackson model (Mack & Jackson, 1993).
- Collection and analysis of data using an SPSS program procedure (Cronk, 1999).
- Presentation of recommendations based on the results of the data for enhancing the education of Laotian students.

KEY TERMS

Best teacher: An individual who has the perceived stereotype or serves as a model for the desirable characteristics of a successful teacher.

Collaborative project: An advanced research project conducted in partnership with faculty for the subsequent intent of publication and presentation.

Ethnolinguistic population: An American population group that views itself as a distinct subculture based on a combination of both language and ethnic heritage.

Hmong: Laotian ethnic minority representing the Meo of the Lao Soung.

Laotian: Laotians representing the Lao Loum group.

Laotian refugee: Refugees from Laos arriving between 1975 and 1990.

Likert scale: A rating scale that consists of a series of attitude statements about some person, group, or thing. Respondents provide the extent to which they agree or disagree with each statement.

Survey instrument: A questionnaire format that was read to each respondent and recorded by this researcher.

LIMITATIONS

The limitations of this project include:

- A non-random survey of Laotian refugee parents.
- Limited publications in the professional literature on the Laotian American population.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review will summarize the salient research and how it reflects on the challenges that Laotian parents must face in the education of their children. The research is divided into five areas: the challenge of language, the struggle of being a refugee, the challenge of parent expectations, the challenge of culture, the challenge of having children in American schools.

The Challenge of Language

With regard to educational issues, the first challenge of Laotian parents is that of English language proficiency. A strong relationship exists between English proficiency and the quality of life measures that a family may experience. Competency in the English language sets the meter for the ways in which families can accomplish the survival needs of their families. Parents lacking English proficiency must depend on their children to serve as the translators and conveyors of information regarding the formal systems that have an important impact on their lives (Taylor & Barton, 1994; Holt, 1991; Dao & Grossman, 1987).

Effective communication with the schools depends on both the spoken language and the written language (literacy). Too often, the reciprocity between the school and the home is contingent on a literate parent who is able to read formal documents from the school and to convey responses back to the school in a written format. Lacking effective English communication skills, Laotian parents may withdraw from direct contact with the school and assume those teachers and administrators are positively managing the stewardship of their children (Kamm, 1990; Franklin, 1990; Morrow, 1991).

The Struggle of Being a Refugee

Few Americans are sensitive to the demands that are placed on individuals who arrive as refugees in a culture that stands in contrast to: ethnicity, language, religion, cultural traditions, family arrangements, etc. Although many Laotians may look a great

deal like any American, it is important to remember that their lives have been extremely different, and that the stress of adjustment continues to be great long after their survival needs have been met (Benson, 1990; Dufresne, 1992; Smith& Tarallo, 1993; Trueba et al., 1993).

Whatever the outward manifestations, it is important to understand that the underlying causes of Laotian refugees' problems may be their particularly stressful experiences in both Asia and in this country. These experiences include:

- Pre-immigration factors, such as their ethnicity, class status, and general cultural values;
- Migration factors, such as their time of departure, and their escape, camp, and migration experiences, and
- Post-immigration factors, such as whether they now live near other Laotians, how different their new environment is from the one they were used to in South East Asia, and the reception in their host community (Nidorf, 1985)

Many Laotian refugees have become self-sufficient but the majority of the population is facing desperate problems exacerbated by years in Thai refugee camps and a long history of political conflict. Their struggle is a serious challenge for the schools since Laotian refugees operate out of four identity systems (South East Asian, American, refugee, and minority) that at times overlap but more often are in conflict. (Goldstein, 1995; Peters, 1988; Rumbaut & Ima, 1988).

Laotians of all ages know that they need more than jobs, grades, or even English to feel at home in their new country. They must face the hardships of being accepted and respected by the native population, and must adapt to a new culture without relinquishing the heritage that has been fundamental to their identity and development. As well, the significant influx of Asian refugees has led to anti-Asian sentiments, and even acts of violence across the country (Asher, 1989; US. Commission on Civil Rights, 1988, Wehrly & Nelson, 1986).

The Laotian population tends to occupy the lower-income category in American society, representing individuals who arrived from primarily a village and subsistence farming background. Prevailing economic conditions, labor and housing markets, and refugee legal status act as a quagmire in their quest for economic success. To meet basic survival needs increasing numbers of women are required to work and extended families are required to share a single house (Phaff, 1995).

Laotian parents are faced with the difficult task of rearing children when traditional family practices are changing, and where the schools and other governmental agencies operate under formal practices that monitor family condition. The children of these refugees face peer pressure that is even greater than on the American-born. Accordingly, they quickly take on the outward cultural traits of those around them – at the expense of their own cultural heritage. At home, these traits often cause friction within families, who rightly want to preserve some of their own traditional heritage. Their children often manifest problems in ways that look American such as: gang behavior, drugs, suicide, alienation, family conflict, poor achievement in school, the adoption of extreme dress and makeup (Ascher, 1989; Yao, 1985).

The Challenge of Parent Expectations

Using the guidelines established by McLuan (1970), as cited in Wright (1984), it was discovered that the term "teacher" and "good teacher" represented strong positive stereotypes, and were inclusive of the characteristics of a "well-liked" teacher. He discovered, as well, that the attributes associated with these terms could be useful in selecting and/or evaluating teachers.

The teacher is the most direct link to the school for parents and their perception of the teacher is the primary reason why parents, without exception, said they "liked" the school. If parents like the teacher(s) of their children, they are more favorably disposed toward the school than otherwise (Dabney & Davis 1982; Mack, 1995).

Parental attitudes and involvement in the educational process are crucial components of effective schooling for minority children. When parents show an interest in

their children's education and maintain high expectations for their preference, they are promoting attitudes that are critical to achievement attitudes that can be formed independently of social class or their external circumstances. Parent goals emerged as strong predictors of achievement gains, especially in the analysis of female, minority, and lower income students' data (Mack & Jackson, 1993, Mack et. al., 1995; Slaughter-Defoe, 1993; Henderson, 1988; Ford, 1993).

Parent attitudes, whether begun before or after a child starts school, have significant, long lasting effects. If these attitudes and experiences are based on negative educational influences, they promote the development of attitudes that inhibit achievement in school. Children whose parents were perceived to support their teachers and schools were found to be more optimistic than children whose parents were not supportive (Slaughter-Defoe, 1993; Phillips, 1992).

Morrow (1991) stated that among the many factors that influence the level and quality of Southeast Asian parents' involvement with schools are parents' literacy level, prearrival education, and strong cultural beliefs. If these attitudes and experiences are based on negative educational influences, they promote the development of attitudes that inhibit achievement in school (Phillips, 1992; Lott, 1998; Lee, 1995; Reglin, 1993; Honig, 1993; Schlak, 1994).

The Challenge Culture

The Laotian (Lao Loum) majority population has become the minority "face" both among the Laotians who have migrated to the USA and within the American culture. In contrast, the Lao Song (Hmong) minority in Laos has become the majority Laotian population in the USA and has received the most formal academic study and provision of support services. Within these two groups, Lao Loum versus Lao song, few cross-ethnic friendships have been established (Lao Information, 1999; Goldstein, 1985; Peters, 1988; Pobzeb, 1999).

It is important for American teachers to understand the intense desire of the Laotian population to maintain its culture, language, traditions, and religion. However,

Laotian cultural identity often confronts the values held by American schools and the western Christian traditions. If we are to improve the opportunity of Laotian students to learn, educators must become sensitive to their ethnohistorical and sociocultural legacy.

The following list of cultural traits may be viewed as both opportunities and challenges for the schools:

- a strong family-orientated society,
- a tradition of teenage arranged marriages,
- a belief in an education for some but not all males in a family,
- a need to display material possessions of extreme value and prestige,
- non-assertiveness
- ancestor worship
- social structure designed to avoid "loss of face,"
- strong group identity,
- embarrassment in receiving praise,
- a belief in extremely limited education for females in favor of marriage,
- belief in corporal punishment in child rearing,
- use of shamans and trained herbalists for the practice of medical and psychological diagnosis and treatment,
- lack of the concept of adolescence whereas youth are expected to assume adult roles early in life,
- a diet that is radically different from American cuisine,
- encouragement of females to marry as soon as possible, raise children, and work in the home,
- low parental educational levels,
- non-egalitarian gender roles.,
- females have limited rights to challenge male authority, or to develop self-esteem, one of the primary tasks of American adolescents,

- children are held, carried, and allowed to develop in their own time. Accordingly, it is difficult to explain to parents the distinction between a child's potential to perform and actual performance. In contrast, American children are encouraged early in life to be independent and are expected to develop according to established developmental milestones.
- intense respect for the authority of adults and older individuals,
- and a resolute Buddhist religious tradition (Ghuman, 1994; Hutchinson & McNall, 1994; Keiter, 1990; McInnis, 1991; Walker, 1991; Iverson & Krabo, 1993; Anderson, 1991; Hones, 1997; Rick & Forward, 1992; Mueller, 1993; Hughes, 1992; Timm, 1994; Trueba et. al., 1990; Pfaff, 1995; Hughes, 1993).

The Challenge Laotian Children in American Schools

Laotians have a reputation for having positive attitudes toward education and doing extremely well academically. In reality, though, not all students are excelling, often because of school-induced problems, such as indiscriminate age-grade matching, poorly designed and staffed English-as-a-Second Language (ESL) programs, premature mainstreaming (often into low-achieving classes), and general insensitivity of school systems to the their special needs. Coming from more authoritarian education systems, Laotian students can also sometimes see their American schools as having no behavioral limits, and so become discipline problems (Asher, 1989; Wehrly & Nelson, 1986; Goodwin & Benevento, 1993).

Laotian students are often encumbered by the popular belief that all Asian students are "extremely brilliant." However, Asian Americans think of themselves as quite different from one another, as indeed they are. The "model minority" stereotype has been applied to Laotian students with undesirable consequences. One such consequence is that Laotians from disadvantaged backgrounds tend to be bypassed in terms of supportive services. Although many Laotian students are highly successful, large numbers of them have serious educational disadvantages. They are in need of assistance, support, and encouragement from parents, teachers, counselors, and

institutions (Goto, 196; Kao, 1995; Kim 1997; Fejgin, 1995, Lai et al., 1990; Chen & Stevenson, 1995; Schram, 1993; Siu, 1996; Watts-Warren, 1995).

Laotian students, more so than non-Asian students, have higher levels of fear over the negative consequences of academic failure and lower levels of situational self-efficiency beliefs. Adolescents who migrated after the age of 11 have suffered particular stress. This is because they simultaneously had to pass through the developmental crisis of "identify formation," characteristic of adolescence, and the historical crisis of becoming a refugee (Huang & Waxman, 1994; Schneider & Lee, 1990; Nidorf, 1985; Eaton & Dembo, 1996).

Limitations

This literature review was restricted by the paucity of research that has been conducted on the Laotian population.

Summary

Based on the review of the salient research, a summary of the important findings include:

1. For Laotian refugees a strong relationship exists between English proficiency and education on the quality of school involvement.
2. Many Laotian parents face challenges in providing for the basic needs of their families, low parental education, employment in low-wage jobs requiring increasing numbers of women to work, and limited English proficiency.
3. Parents face the difficult task of rearing children when traditional family practices are changing and where the schools operate with more formal practices.
4. A strong relationship on achievement performance was found in the following set of variables: a. Generation in the United States to which they belong, b. Parents' education, c. English fluency, d. Social-class status, and e. Hours spent on homework.
5. While the children of Laotian refugees arrive at school with many educational disadvantages, they bring to school many advantages of: a two-parent family

structure with relatively low stress and instability, high parental expectations, strong social support networks, a hearty sense of culture, well defined role models, and an active religious background.

6. Programs for Laotian students could become more effective if they would establish the active involvement of parents.
7. Although many Asian American students are highly successful, large numbers of them are in need of assistance, support, and encouragement from parents, teachers, counselors, and institutions.
8. The adjustment of Asian American language minority students to the mainstream culture is contingent on an understanding of their ethnohistorical and sociocultural contexts. If we are to improve their opportunities to learn, educators must take these critical issues into consideration.
9. Asian American students, more so than non-Asian students, have higher levels of fear over the negative consequences of academic failure and lower levels of situational self-efficiency beliefs.
10. The prevailing mainstreaming or assimilation model of education does not fit the needs of Asian American refugee children; as a result, schools are undereducating a substantial number of young people.
11. Adolescence is a middle-class American concept describing young people who are no longer children but who do not work; a period where certain kinds of behavior are expected to occur in both the school and home/community. It does not match the Lao culture that does not include the concept of adolescence where young people are expected to accept various adult roles.
12. Laotian culture assumes that a child's current functioning is all that a child is capable of being, it is difficult to explain to parents the distinctions between a child's potential to perform and actual performance. In contrast, "American" children are encouraged early in life to be independent and are expected to develop according to developmental timetables.

13. For the Laotian refugees, parental involvement must become a high priority goal in improving the lives of their children. The research stressed the need for schools to aggressively attempt to involve parents in the education process.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY AND DATA RESULTS

PROJECT METHODOLOGY

Twenty-eight Likert-based interviews (Appendix A) were given to Laotian refugee parents residing in five states in the United States (Ohio, Michigan, Iowa, Florida and Texas). The interviews provided the parents with the opportunity to offer their opinions on 28 questions regarding the characteristics of a "best teacher." The interview allowed them to respond in four different ways: strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. The data was analyzed using the SPSS (Cronk, 1999) statistical program.

DATA RESULTS: DEMOGRAPHICS

The following information provides the demographics for the respondents (n = 28), based on self-reported data:

Age of respondent: mean = 45.25 years, minimum = 29 years, maximum = 68 years

Gender distribution: male = 11 or 39.3 percent and female = 17 or 60.7 percent

Born in Laos: 28 or 100 percent

USA citizen: 23 yes or 82.1 percent, 5 no or 17.9 percent

Highest level of education:

no formal education = 2 or 7.1 percent

1-4 years = 3 or 10.7 percent

5-8 years = 3 or 10.7 percent

9-12 years = 11 or 39.3 percent

some college = 6 or 21.4 percent

baccalaureate degree = 3 or 10.7 percent

Years in the USA: 6-10 years = 2 or 7.1 percent

11-15 years = 9 or 32.1 percent

16-20 years = 17 or 60.7 percent

DATA RESULTS: INTERVIEW

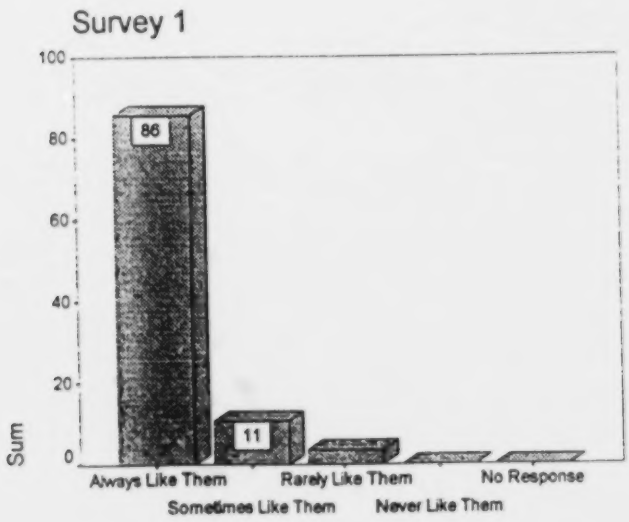
Frequency and percentage using a Likert Scale of report survey responses:

- **AL = always like them**
- **SL = sometimes like them**
- **RL = rarely like them**
- **NL = never like them**
- **NR = no response**

For example, reporting a response by using "25/89.3 indicates that 25 individuals or 89.3 percent of the total group made the selection. The bar graph reports responses by percentage.

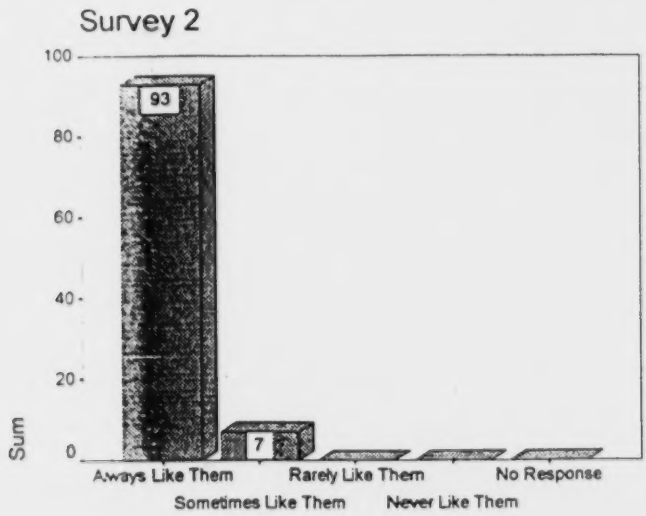
1. Had high expectations for all students

AL =24/85.7 SL= 3/10.7 RL = 1/3.6 NL = 0\0



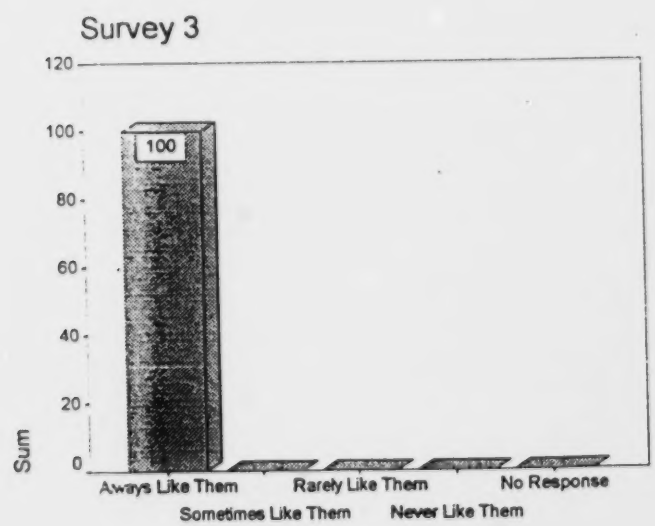
2. Treated all students fairly without playing favorites

AL =26/92.9 SL=2/7.1 RL =0/0 NL =0/0



3. Able to manage disruptive behavior

AL =28/100 SL=0/0 RL =0/0 NL =0/0



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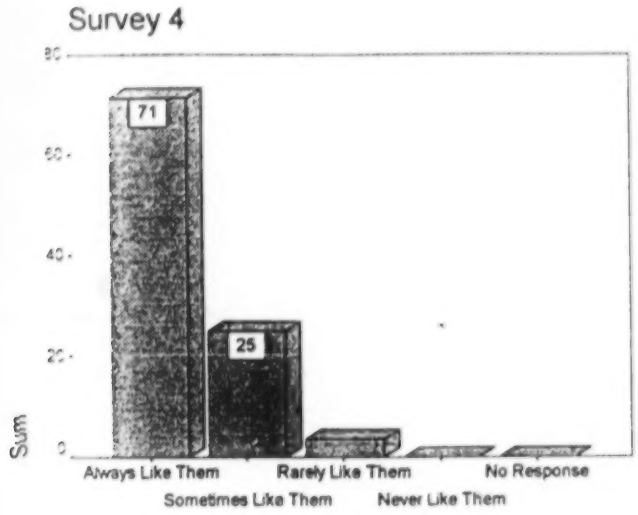
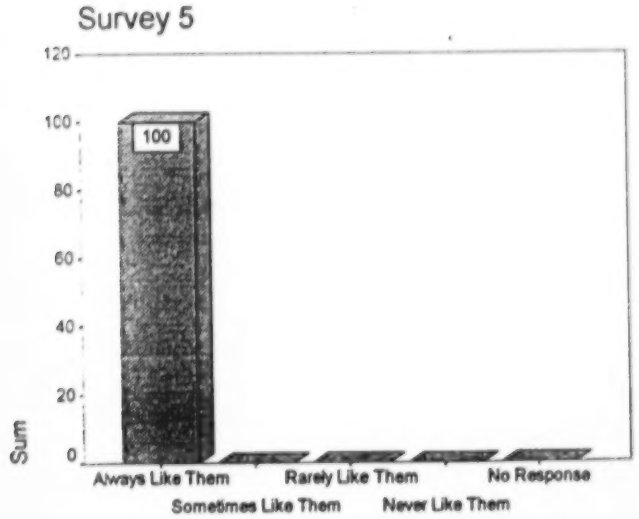
4. Effectively communicated with students at their level of learning

AL =20/71.4 SL=7/25.0 RL =1/3.6 NL =0/0



5. Enforced a positive discipline code based on clear and fair rules

AL =28/100 SL=0/0 RL =0/0 NL =0/0



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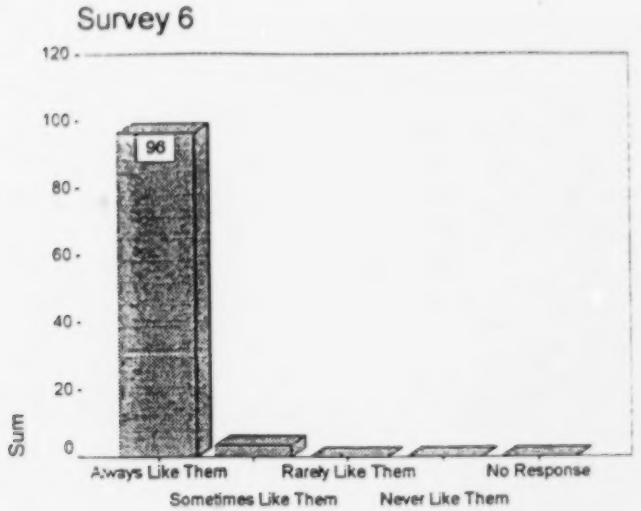
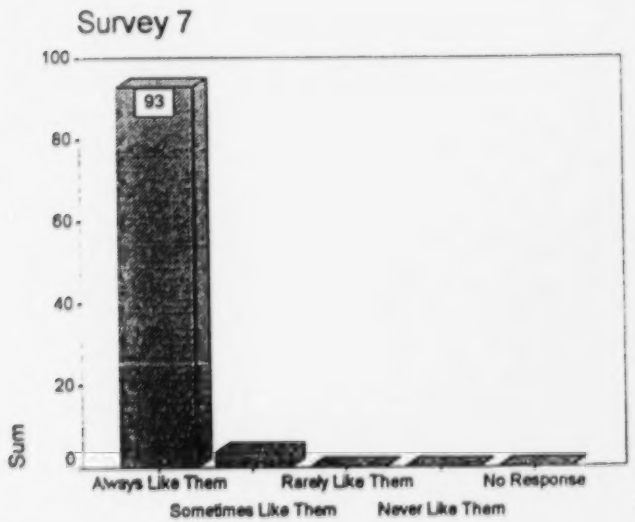
6. Assigned homework on regular basis which was designed to help students learn

AL =27/96.4 SL=1/3.6 RL =0/0 NL =0/0



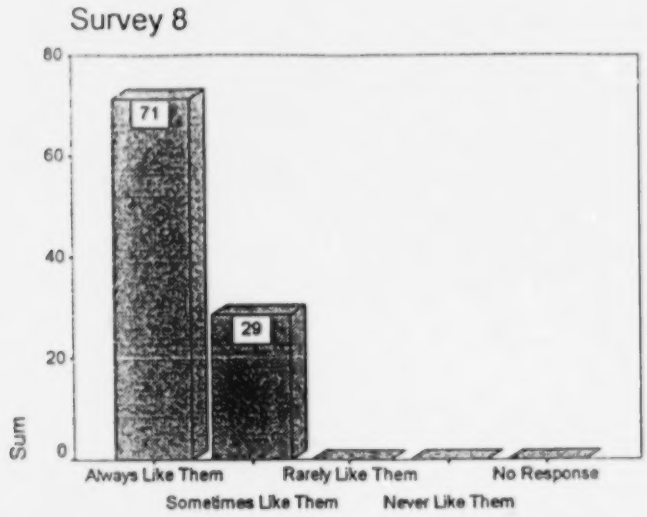
7. Was able to build self-esteem by using praise while avoiding ridicule

AL =26/92.9 SL=1/3.6 RL =0/0 NL =0/0 NR = 1/3.6



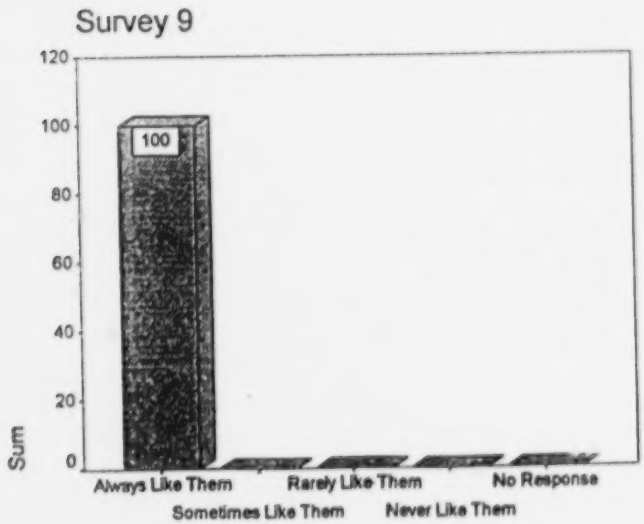
8. Demonstrated a sense of humor

AL =20/71.4 SL=8/28.6 RL =0/0 NL =0/0



9. Demonstrated punctuality and good attendance

AL =28/100 SL=0/0 RL =0/0 NL =0/0



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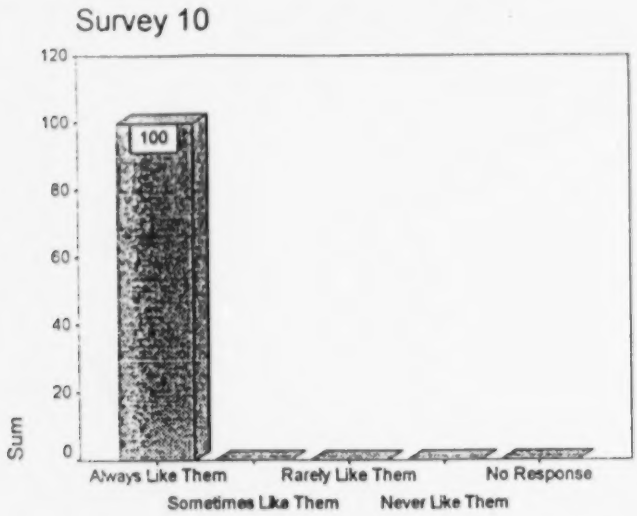
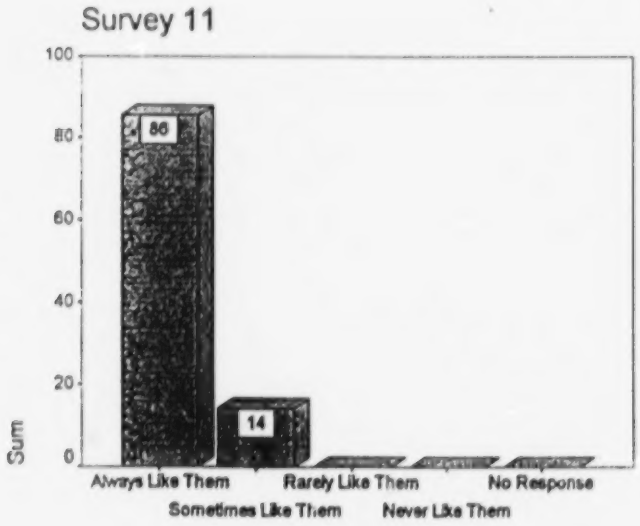
10. Accepted constructive criticism in a positive manner

AL =28/100 SL=0/0 RL =0/0 NL =0/0



11. Was enthusiastic about teaching and made learning fun

AL =24/85.7 SL=4/14.3 RL =0/0 NL =0/0



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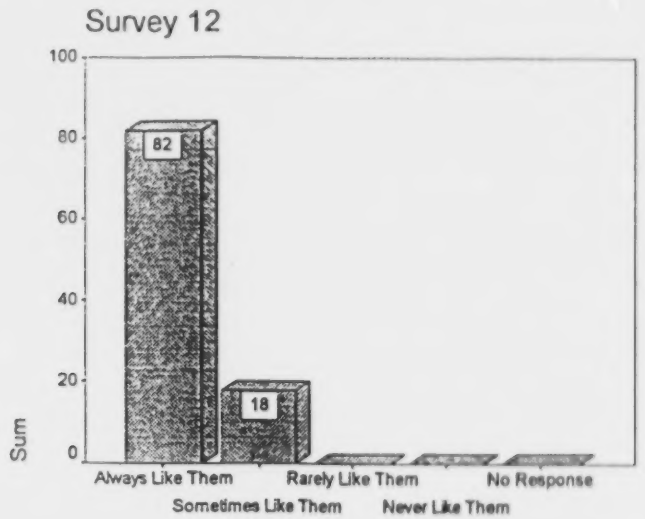
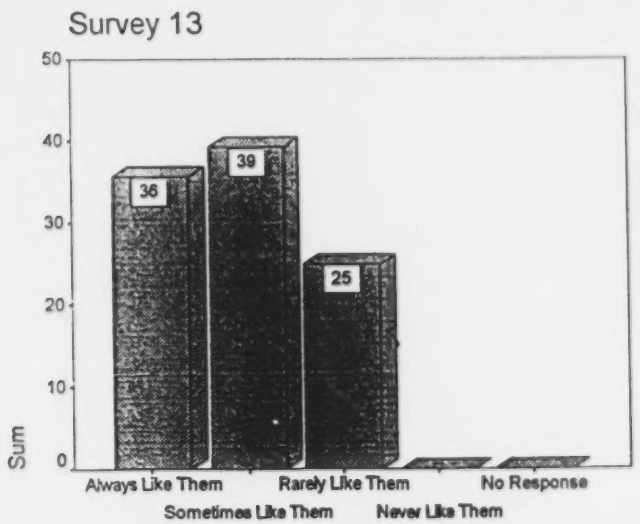
12. Provided parents with directions on how they could help with homework

AL =23/82.1 SL=5/17.9 RL =0/0 NL =0/0



13. Remembered to reward positive behavior rather than always punishing negative

AL =10/35.7 SL=11/39.3 RL =7/25.0 NL =0/0



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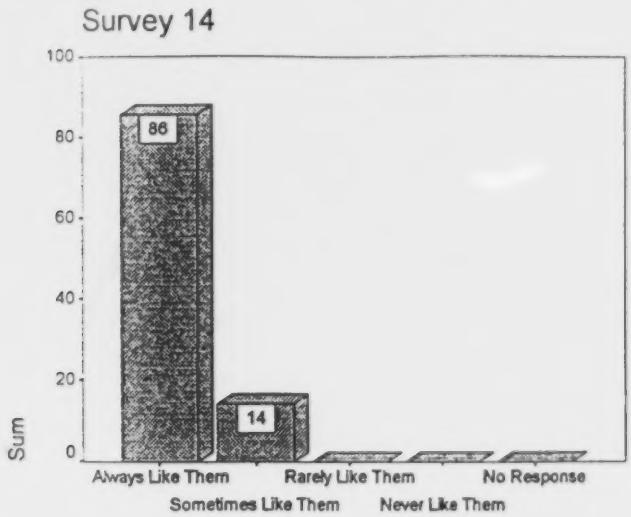
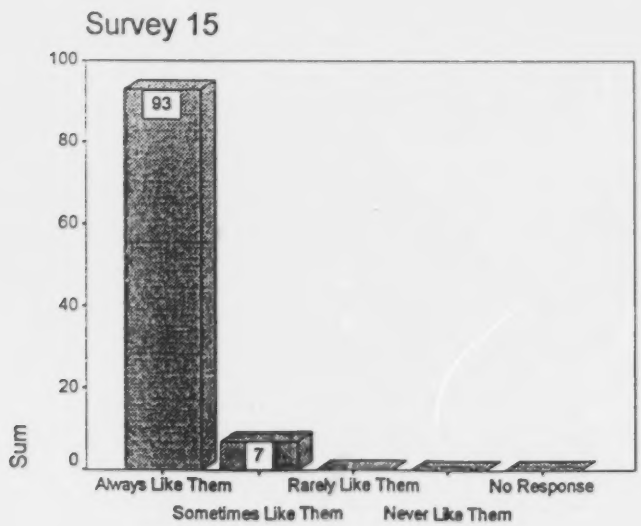
14. Encouraged parent involvement by involving them in their student's education

AL =24/85.7 SL=4/14.3 RL =0/0 NL =0/0



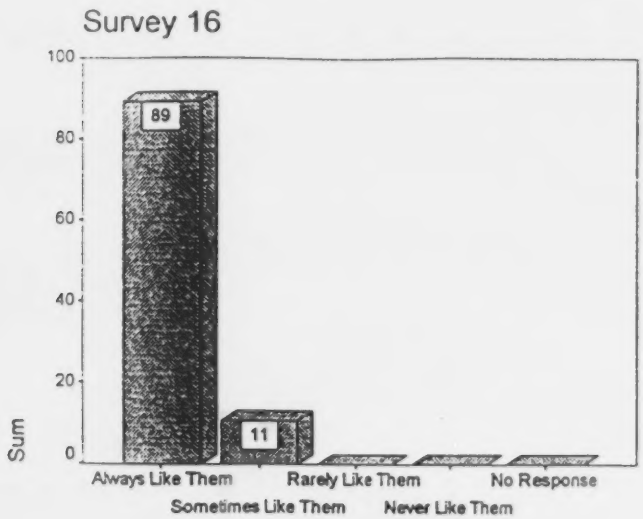
15. Concerned about each student as an individual with unique needs/contributions

AL =26/92.9 SL=2/7.1 RL =0/0 NL =0/0



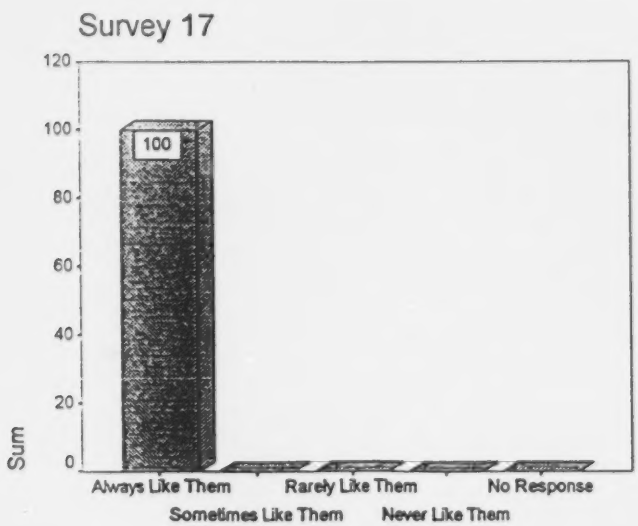
16. Dressed like a professional

AL =25/89.3 SL=3/10.7 RL =0/0 NL =0/0



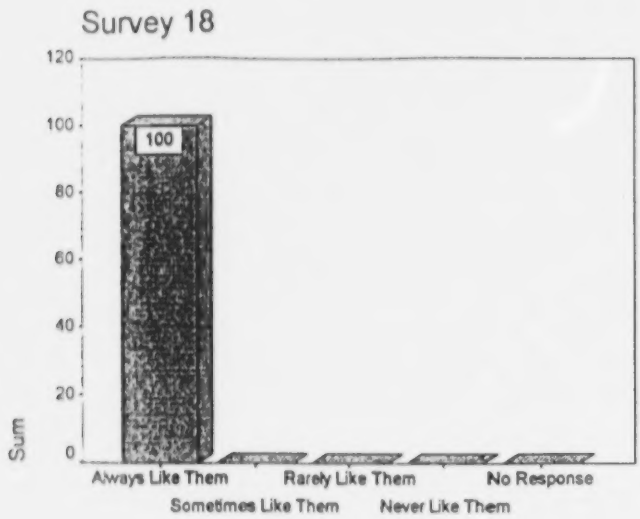
17. Was fair when discussing issues of race and ethnicity

AL =28/100 SL=0/0 RL =0/0 NL =0/0



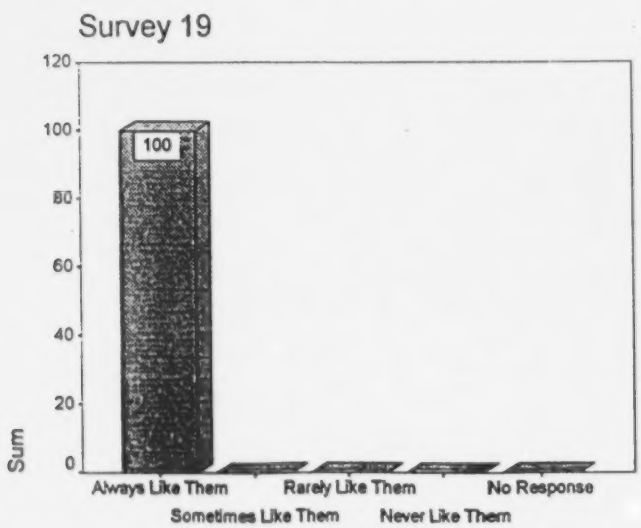
18. Presented contributions of different racial/ethnic groups in positive manner

AL =28/100 SL=0/0 RL =0/0 NL =0/0



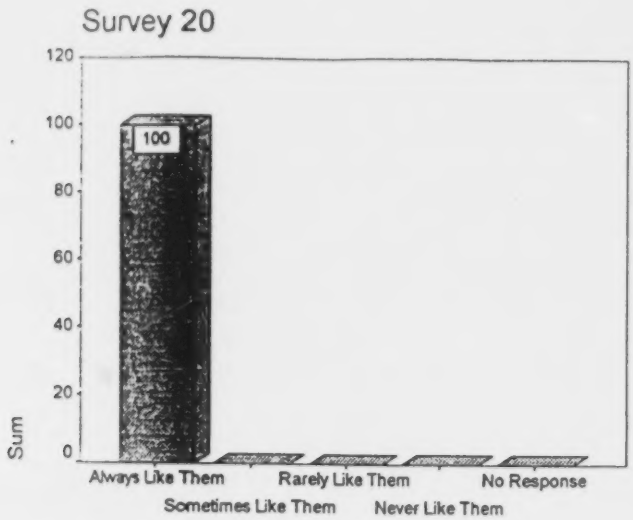
19. Was objective in teaching male and female students

AL =28/100 SL=0/0 RL =0/0 NL =0/0



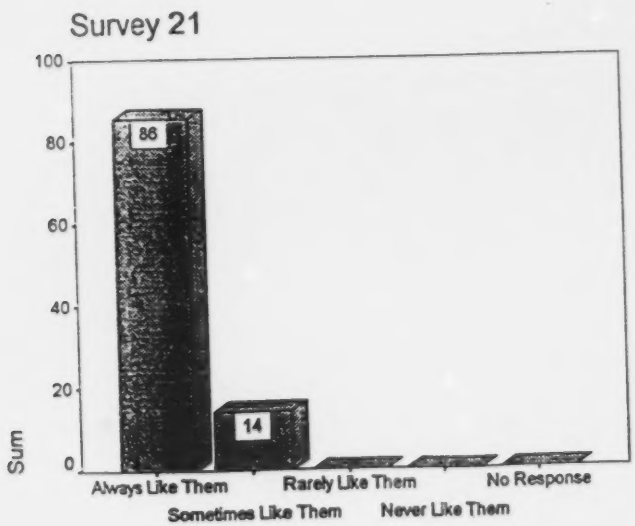
20. Conversed without the use of excessive slang or poor grammar

AL =28/100 SL=0/0 RL =0/0 NL =0/0



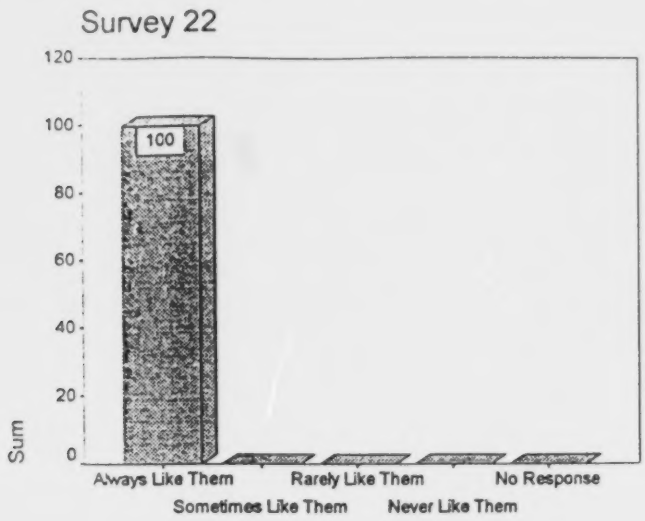
21. Was a visible participant in community organizations or religious groups

AL =24/85.7 SL=4/14.3 RL =0/0 NL =0/0



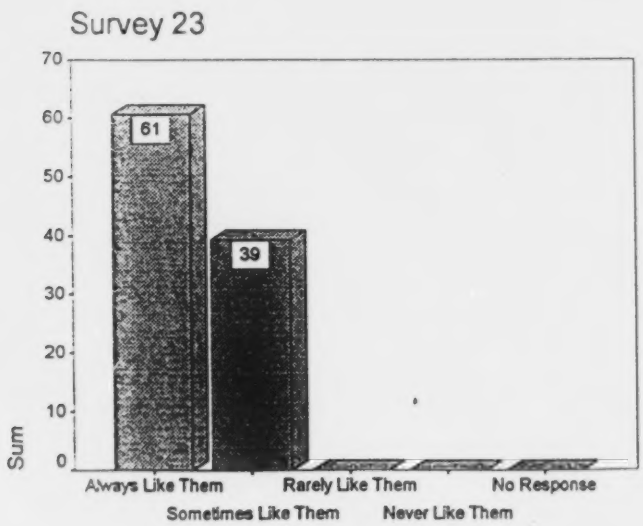
22. Served as a role model of a successful individual

AL =28/100 SL=0/0 RL =0/0 NL =0/0



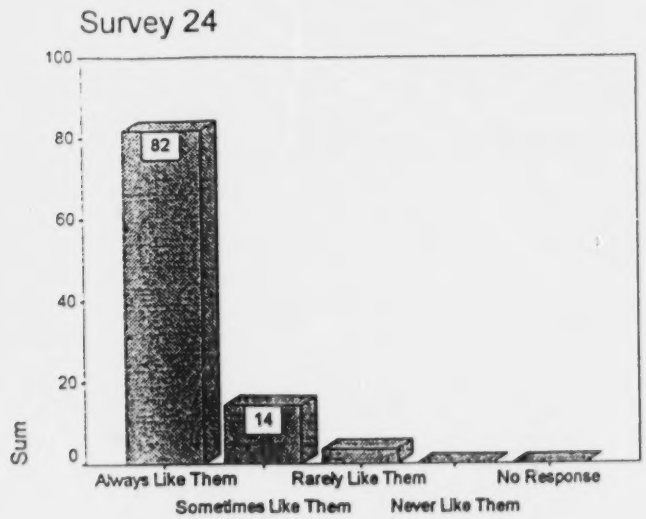
23. Was available to discuss problems related to issues outside of the school

AL =17/60.7 SL=11/39.3 RL =0/0 NL =0/0



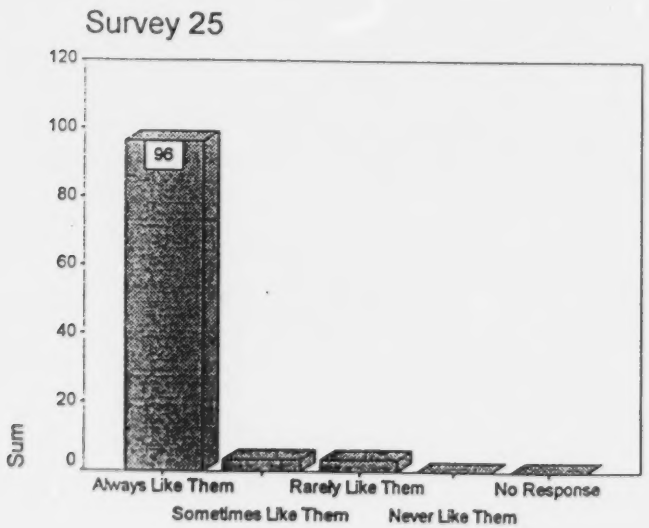
24. Was demanding in awarding grades

AL =23/82.1 SL=4/14.3 RL =1/3.6 NL =0/0



25. Encouraged students to develop a sense of pride in their school

AL =27/96.4 SL=1/3.6 RL =0/0 NL =0/0



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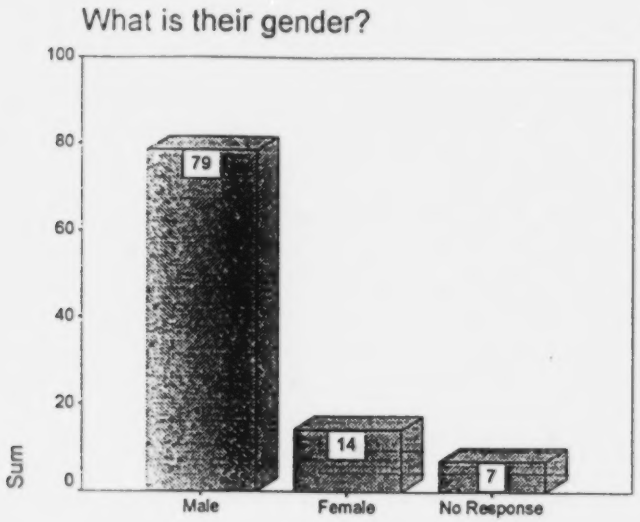
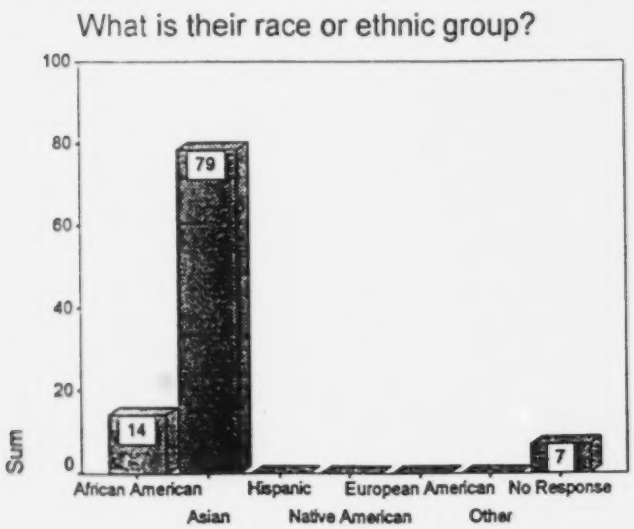
28. What is their gender?

Male = 22/78.6 Female = 4/14.3 NR = 2/7.1



29. What is their race or ethnic group?

Asian = 22/78.6 African-American = 4/14.3 NR = 2/7.1



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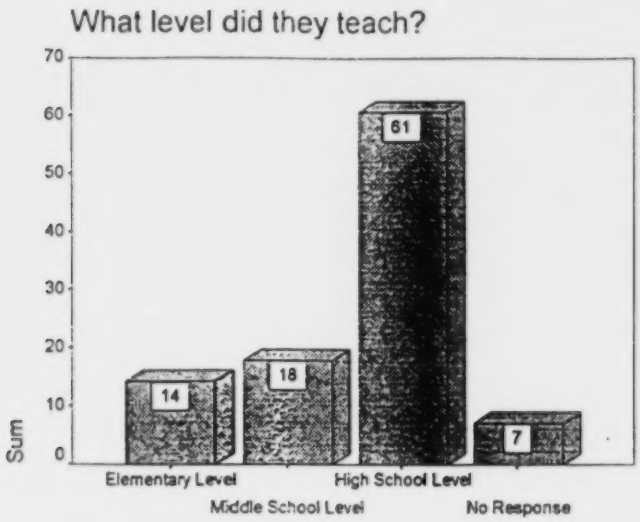
30. What level did they teach?

elementary = 4/14.3 middle school = 5/17.9 high school = 17/60.7 NR = 2/7.1



CONCLUSIONS

"What are the perceived characteristics of teachers considered to be the "best teacher" in the academic careers of Laotian refugee parents?" These parents gave responses that reflected their "best teacher" as being Asian, teaching at high school level, and being male.

By ranking total parents' selection by percentage of individuals choosing "always like them," the following list reflects the ten highest characteristics of the "best teacher.":

1. Was able to manage disruptive behavior.
2. Enforced a positive discipline code based on clear and fair rules.
3. Demonstrated punctuality and good attendance.
4. Accepted constructive criticism in a positive manner.

5. Was fair when discussing issues of race and ethnicity.
6. Presented contributions of different racial/ethnic groups in positive manner.
7. Was objective in teaching male and female students.
8. Conversed without the use of excessive slang or poor grammar.
9. Served as a role model of a successful individual.
10. Tied for rank:
    - Encouraged students to develop a sense of pride in their school.
    - Assigned homework on regular basis, which was designed to help students learn.

By ranking total parents' selection by percentage of individuals choosing "never like them" and "rarely like them" the following list reflects the characteristics least like a "best teacher.":

1. Remembered to reward positive behavior rather than always punishing negative behavior.
2. Had high expectations for all students.
3. Was demanding in awarding grades.
4. Effectively communicated with students at their level of learning.

The perceptions of a "best teacher" for Laotian refugees may be based on prior experiences in Laos and may not concur with the characteristics identified in the U.S. for "best teacher." In Laos, a teacher is eminently respected and education is considered to be a special privilege for the child. Culturally, education is highly valued and the teacher is expected to fulfill a unique role in the education of children. Parents grant the teacher full authority to accomplish his/her mission using whatever methods, discipline, or nurturing required. Rarely will parents question the procedures used by the child's teacher.

Because of the language barrier often children of Laotian refugees will serve as translators and conveyers of information regarding their teachers and schools. This in turn, may affect the communications between the home and school. Frequently a

reciprocal barrier occurs because teachers may be reluctant to attempt to make direct contact with parents who are limited in their facility with the English language. Consequently, neither party, parent nor teacher may have the opportunity of learning about each other and their priorities for child's experience in the schools.

Laotian parents perceptions of the characteristics of a "best teacher" may vary greatly from the qualities deemed important in the training efforts of institutions of higher education. They have identified unique characteristics deemed typical of a "best teacher". Accordingly, as schools in the United States become more diverse, they must respond to the paragons these parents have attributed to a successful teacher.

These findings are useful in providing a guide for schools and teachers in the process of educating the children of Laotian refugees. The stereotype of a "best teacher" is highly associated with the characteristics of a well-liked teacher. Although this stereotype is value laden, it serves as a model for the desirable attributes that these parents expect of a successful teacher.

Additional research is needed to investigate the influence of parental school expectations and attitudes on student achievement, orientation, beliefs, and values. It necessitates an approach that observes parental and child behavior within the environment in which it occurs and analyzes behavior(s) according to the value systems of the family's indigenous culture.

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